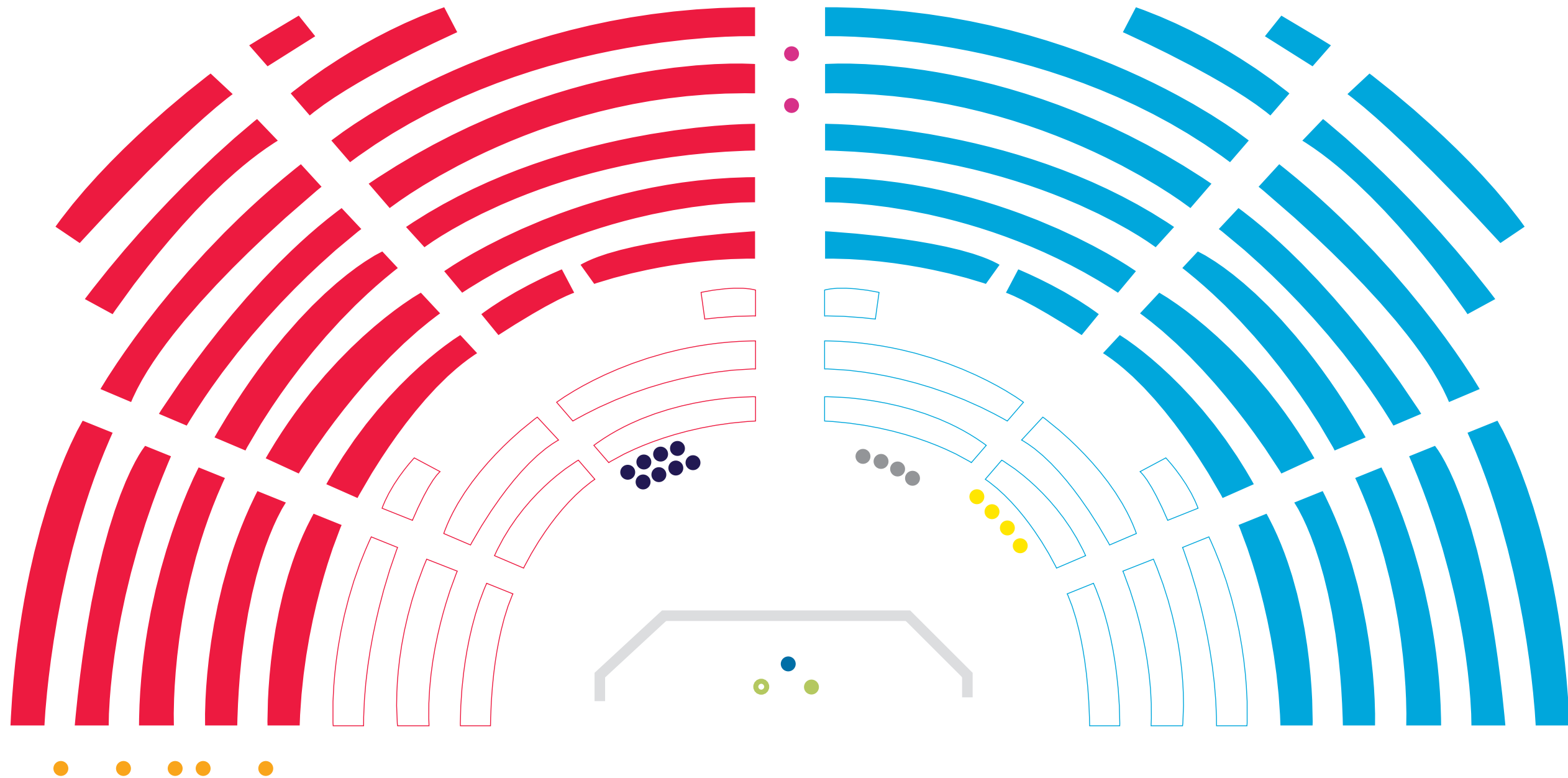




Annual Ritual Brings Washington Together

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It's a family reunion for democracy: the annual State of the Union address, when the president reviews his accomplishments before Congress and voices his dreams and plans for the nation's future. A microcosm of America packs the ornate chamber of the House of Representatives for the speech. Aside from state funerals and inaugurations, it's the only time all branches of government are in the same room. The audience doesn't always agree with the president, but the evening is a reminder of the importance of meeting and, of course, listening.



- President**
His speech appears on a teleprompter, allowing him to read while looking at the audience.
- Vice President**
Because the vice president is also president of the Senate, he's given a copy of the speech. During the speech, the vice president acts as chief cheerleader, encouraging applause.
- House Speaker**
As leader of the House of Representatives, he is host. Arrivals are announced to him. The president, before beginning, hands him a copy of the speech.

- EXECUTIVE BRANCH**
- Cabinet Members**
These heads of executive departments are eager to hear their boss speak.
 - Joint Chiefs of Staff**
The military leaders, because they are under the president's command, sit with the Cabinet.

- JUDICIARY BRANCH**
- Supreme Court**
It's rare for all nine justices to attend, but some do.

- LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**
- Republicans**
Recent maps of election results associate wins by Republicans with the color red.
 - Democrats**
Democrats' election wins recently have been mapped with blue.
 - Representatives**
After welcoming the president, they sit first because it is their chamber. Many of the 435 members, representing districts apportioned by state population, arrive early to sit on the aisle in order to shake the president's hand as he walks to the podium.

- Senators**
100 Senators, two elected from each state, visit the larger House chamber to listen.
- Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms**
He announces the vice president, senators, diplomatic corps, Supreme Court justices and Joint Chiefs of Staff.
- Sergeant-at-Arms**
He exclaims, "Mr. Speaker, the president of the United States!" as the president enters.
- Escorts**
These lawmakers escort the president down the aisle. It is considered a great honor.

- VISITORS**
- Diplomatic Corps**
Ambassadors from other nations sit near a portrait of France's Marquis de Lafayette, the first foreign dignitary to address Congress.
 - First Lady and Friends** (*upper level*)
She invites ordinary Americans who have done extraordinary things to sit with her
 - Visitors** (*upper level*)
Lawmakers invite guests to send symbolic messages. In 2013, a Texas representative invited an undocumented immigrant advocating for legal status.

- MEDIA (UPPER LEVEL)**
- Print Media**
The speech is popular; reporters need to reserve seats.
 - Broadcast Media**
One camera is hidden in the flag to film the president speaking, one sweeps the audience, one captures entrances and three film from the press galleries.